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SUBJECT: JORDANIAN REACTION TO AUTHORIZED DEPARTURE AND  
PEACE CORPS DEPARTURE

Classified By: Haynes Mahoney, PAO, Reason 1.5 b and d

1. (U) Summary. Jordanian official and public reactions to the announcement of authorized departure and the departure of the Peace Corps are mixed. While GOJ leaders and many businessmen express regret but "understanding" for the decisions, the columnists and some of our contacts say they are confused, suspicious and resentful over a move which they believe will undermine Jordan's reputation as a safe place for tourism and business. "Do you know what you're doing to Jordan?" one journalist contact asked angrily, predicting that the already troubled economy would take more hits and for no good reason. Foreign Minister Muasher and Information Minister Adwan tried to minimize the impact, stressing that the departure policy is voluntary and limited in scope and predicting that the Peace Corps' absence is temporary. Ambassador Gnehm plans to clarify misunderstandings about the nature of the decisions when he speaks to Jordan's Petra News Agency today. End Summary

2. (C) Official Reaction: What You Had To Do  
Senior officials up to King Abdullah (septel) expressed regret over the conditions behind the authorized departure decision and the temporary removal of the Peace Corps, and repeated their assurance that the GOJ would do everything it could to ensure the security of Embassy personnel and other American citizens. Nevertheless, they said they understood our responsibility to make hard choices to protect the lives of American citizens. "You must do what you have to do," one senior GOJ official told the Ambassador. The head of Jordan's security apparatus, the Public Security Division, told emboffs that he was regretful but "relieved" over the departure of the Peace Corps volunteers, whose locations among poor communities scattered throughout the country posed special challenges.

3. (U) Media Grumbling  
Though all major papers have prominently reported the authorized and Peace Corps departures, mainly drawing on the Foreign and Information Ministers' statements, press commentary has been limited but critical. One column called the departure policies "baseless and unjustifiable," stating that by exaggerating threats to Americans the U.S. was taking away with one hand the considerable aid it gives with the other, and blaming this paradox on unidentified "elements in the U.S. administration" with an anti-Jordanian agenda. Another columnist complained that the measure was hurting Jordan's trade and investment climate even before the expected war in Iraq. Both commentaries echoed the Information Minister's message that Jordan is one of "the safest places on earth."

4. (U) Anxiety Levels Up, Though Businessmen Calm  
Our FSNs received numerous calls over the weekend following the authorized departure announcement in Washington, asking whether all Americans were evacuating Jordan, and whether this step was the first move in the anticipated Iraq war. Our explanation that the departures are voluntary, limited in time and would not interfere with routine Mission services seemed to calm people somewhat though there is still a considerable amount of anxiety and resentment over these highly publicized events. With reports of renewed violence in the southern town of Ma'an, Jordanians feel that the departure of diplomats and Peace Corps volunteers will not enhance their country's reputation or stability. However a quick, informal poll of businessmen shows that most do not believe the decisions will have a significant impact on their business.

5. (C) Comment:  
Most of our contacts assumed from first reports that the decision would lead to a large drawdown of staff and a reduction of programs. As it becomes clear that this is not the case, we expect that the anxiety over the decision will lessen considerably.

GNEHM